

South Dakota National Guard

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

National Guard units prepare for real-world operations

By Sgt. Mark VanGerpen
196th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. – Four hundred South Dakota Army National Guard Soldiers came together for a unique three-day field training exercise, May 1-3, in Sioux Falls.

The exercise brought together 12 units under the command of the 196th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade for a large-scale, joint operation in a simulated wartime scenario.

“The biggest benefit is being able to bring all the units of the brigade together,” said Maj. Troy Ness, assistant operations officer with the MEB. “It gives us a chance to train in a different environment from the armory. In the field we can actually practice our field-craft skills, take our equipment out and set it up, make sure it’s serviceable, and practice what we’re trained to do.”

On the surface, the weekend’s mission required Soldiers to restore essential services and civil security to a war-torn fictional country.

In reality, it was a test of the 196th’s readiness to deploy and establish a vast system of security operations quickly and efficiently.

In the space of two days, the 196th erected a tactical operations center housing a powerful computer network capable of coordinating and supporting dozens of operations at once. Supporting battalions then conducted a wide array of operations, one of which was to construct a bridge across an impassable stream.

The 200th Engineer Company deployed the mobile heavy dry-span bridge for the task. The bridge is one of only eight in the nation and is solid enough to bear the weight of any vehicle the Army owns.

On a typical drill weekend, units like the 200th train on their own. Exercises like this take complex, long-term planning. Extended exercises can take up to 18 months to plan and prepare.

“Bringing that force together creates a realistic training environment that closely resembles a deployed environment, providing training opportunities that are not usually available,” said Ness.

The property the 196th used for training belongs to Sioux Falls resident Tom Sweetman. Sweetman allows the SDARNG to train on his land every year, and has done so for the past 15 years.

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“What (the SDARNG does) keeps us safe, so whatever we can do to help, in any way we can, we’re happy to do it,” Sweetman said.

In all the years the SDNG has trained on his property, Sweetman had not visited the training until this year.

“It’s far more substantial than I envisioned,” Sweetman said during a tour of the site. “The equipment, the trucks, the supplies...you just don’t realize the extent of what it takes to support 400 people.”

The entire exercise was a test run for the 196th’s upcoming annual training in Camp Ripley, Minn. There, the tasks performed by the units for three days will be intensified and last two weeks.

“It gives us a chance to truly practice and refine what we’re going to do when we go to (annual training) at Camp Ripley,” said Ness.

The exercise culminated in a digitally conducted brigade update brief, which consisted of the unit leaders conducting a full-scale update for the commander using the satellite communications network the Soldiers had linked up during the training.

“Every section did what they needed to do, and the BUB indicated that,” said Ness. “What it really shows is a lot of hard work and effort by the Soldiers to work together as a team. We had some trials and tribulations, but we worked through them to accomplish our mission.”

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High resolution photos are available at www.flickr.com/photos/southdakotationalguard



150501-Z-LN227-009: Staff Sgt. KC Ducheneaux, of Mobridge, sets the pylons on a heavy dry-span bridge at a field training exercise for the 196th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade in Sioux Falls, S.D. Ducheneaux is a member of the 200th Engineer Company, one of 12 units under the 196th that came together for the three-day exercise May 1-3, 2015. Training with such a large group provides a real-world mission atmosphere to improve Soldier readiness. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Mark VanGerpen/Released).



150502-Z-LN227-016: Members of the South Dakota Army National Guard’s 200th Engineer Company construct a heavy dry-span bridge at a field training exercise for the 196th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade in Sioux Falls, S.D. The 200th is one of 12 units under the 196th that came together for the three-day exercise May 1-3, 2015. Training with such a large group provides a real-world mission atmosphere to improve Soldier readiness. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Mark VanGerpen/Released).



150502-Z-LN227-204: Members of the South Dakota Army National Guard’s 200th Engineer Company construct a heavy dry-span bridge at a field training exercise for the 196th Maneuver Enhancement Brigade in Sioux Falls, S.D. The 200th is one of 12 units under the 196th that came together for the three-day exercise May 1-3, 2015. Training with such a large group provides a real-world mission atmosphere to improve Soldier readiness. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Mark VanGerpen/Released).

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